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AUTHOR Shuy, Roger W.
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ABSTRACT

Sociolinguistics is characterized by a concern for viewing language variation and for seeing language in real social contexts. It has a high potential for relationship and application to other fields such as education, sociology, and psychology. Sociolinguistics try to study the speech of a community, and instead of studying the presence or absence of given features in the community, they feel that much can be learned by seeing such features on a continuum. This continuum does not distinguish between right language and wrong language. Each item of the continuum has the potential for appropriateness and accuracy if the proper context is discovered. The point is also made that a speaker may intentionally select forms which, in some other context, would be considered stigmatized. An example is cited of a young boy who deliberately chose to read orally in a monotonous, mechanical way, because he felt that reading with expression would label him a "sissy." It is noted that speakers also make unintentional selection of stigmatized language, as in the use of hypercorrections. Sociolinguistics also study the subject reactions of people to language produced by others. The results of these studies should prove to be important for language teaching and planning. (Author/PM)

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# Sociolinguistics and Reading

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Roger W. Shuy
Georgetown University
International Reading Association
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Roger W. Shuy
Georgetown University
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## What is Sociolinguistics?

Although any effort to define a new and broad field of study such as sociolinguistics is subject to question and criticism by some of its practitioners, it will be useful to attempt at least a broad definition of the term here. Three major characteristics tend to characterize the field:

1. A concern for viewing language variation rather than the sort of universals upon which grammars are usually based.
2. A concern for seeing language in real social contexts rather than as abstract representations.
3. A high potential for relationship and application to other fields such as education, sociology, anthropology, psychology and many others.

In a sense, the third characteristic is really an outgrowth of the first two, but, for our purposes here, these three aspects will be treated equally.

At the present time, a sociolinguist may be defined as a person who studies variation within a language or across languages with a view toward describing that variation or toward writing rules which incorporate it (rather than, as in the past, ignoring it), relating such variation to some aspects of the cultures which use it, doing large scale language surveys (macroanalysis), doing intensive studies of discourse (microanalysis), studying language function (as opposed to language forms), discovering the comparative values of different varieties of language or of different languages for the benefit of political or educational planning and decision making, studying language attitudes, values and beliefs and relating all the above to other fields which may make use of it (including education).

Although there has been a recent flurry of interest in language in

real social settings, it would be foolish to claim that sociolinguistics is a new concept. It is quite likely, in fact, that man has been interested in the sorts of variation by which people set themselves off from each other since the very beginnings of speech. Humans have always lived with the cultural and linguistic paradox of needing to be like each other while, at the same time, needing to establish their individuality. These needs, coupled with the multitude of complexities involved in cultural and linguistic change, motivations, attitudes, values and physiological and psychological differences, present a vast laboratory for sociolinguistic investigation.

Where did Sociolinguistics come from?

In many ways, sociolinguistics involves a putting back together of a number of separations that have taken place over the years within the field of linguistics. For one thing, the separation of language from the realistic context in which it is used has proved very troublesome in recent years. The more traditional view of linguistics (common in the sixties) which excludes the variational and functional aspects of language from formal linguistic analysis and describes such characteristics as mere trivial performance is finding disfavor at a rapid pace. The term static may be used to refer to the frameworks of both structural and transformational linguistics. A static grammar is one which excludes variation of any sort, including time, function, socioeconomic status, sex and ethnicity, from the purview of formal linguistic analysis. Thus, when Noam Chomsky states, "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by performance variations" (1965:4), he is illustrating the static view of language quite succinctly. Thus linguists more or less abdicated any responsibility for studying many of the interesting things about language--the dynamic aspects--in a vain effort to be "purely linguistic", whatever that might mean.

Another clear separation which has been vigorously maintained in linguistics over the years is the separation between synchronic and diachronic studies. That is, the separation of the study of language change from the analysis of a language at a given point in time. Such a notion dates back many years

in the field but is perhaps most notably stated by Bernard Bloch when he attempted to define the goal of phonological analysis as the study of "...the totality of the possible utterances of one speaker at one time in using a language to interact with one other speaker..." (1948:7). Such a theory would seem to imply that a speaker's phonological system is somehow cut off from the developments which gave it life. If, on the other hand, one were to view life as constant movement, one might also hypothesize that language is in equally constant movement in its futile effort to catch up with life. That is, life keeps moving away from the attempts of language at freezing it long enough to interact with it.

Thus, the period of linguistics which is called the structuralist period (the forties and fifties) was actually no different from the following transformationalist era with respect to the adherence to the study of static rather than dynamic language. But by the late sixties some fascinating new developments were taking place in several fields at the same time.

Led by William Labov, a group of scholars interested in variation in American English began to discover some new dimensions of systematic variation.[1] Past studies in American dialectology had described wide-meshed variation but had not accounted for it systematically. Using techniques borrowed largely from sociology, anthropology and psychology, Labov clearly demonstrated that the study of a speech community was more revealing and systematic than the study of individual speakers and that instead of studying presence or absence of given features in the speech community, a great deal could be learned by seeing such features on a continuum. Such analysis began to be called gradient analysis. Thus it became important to know not just whether or not a speaker produced a given sound or grammatical structure but also the circumstances under which that form was produced (linguistic and psycho-sociological) as well as the frequency of occurrence of that form in relationship to consistent, comparable measures. Not all such scholars agreed with each other on the exact nature of this gradience, but the excitement generated by the notion quickly led to an alignment with linguists who had been studying creole languages such as William Stewart, who in 1964 presented his formulation of a continuum with what he called an acrolect at one end and a

basilect at the other (1964:10-18). By this Stewart meant to indicate that speech communities could be plotted on a broad continuum rather than at artificial polarities such as standard or non-standard per se. Acrolect was a person's most standard form. Basilect was his least standard. Creolists had long argued that pidgins and creoles, languages which are under construction and are therefore dynamic, offered the best opportunity to see how languages actually are developed.

At about the same time, the variationists and creolists were joined by a group of transformational linguists who were becoming disenchanted, among other things, by the static nature of their premises. James McCawley, Paul Postan, Robin and George Lakoff, Charles Fillmore, John Ross and others began to raise objections against transformational syntax, noting its inability to accommodate real language, its failure to take into account that language is used by human beings to communicate in a social context and its claim that syntax can be separated from semantics.[2] These scholars, currently called generative semanticists, see variation as heavily involved in grammar whenever the social context of a discourse changes. For example, one might dismiss the sentence, "Ernie thinks with a fork", as ungrammatical unless one knew that such a sentence is a response to the question, "How do you eat potatoes?". In her work on politeness, Robin Lakoff demonstrates the importance of context when she notes that when one addresses a child, "You may do so-and-so" is politer than "You must do so-and-so". But in addressing a dignitary at a party, the hostess who says "You must have a piece of cake" is politer than one who says, "You may have a piece of cake" (Lakoff 1972:907-927).

All of this recent emphasis on social context by linguists was, of course, old hat to anthropologists, especially ethnographers of communication. Dell Hymes has been arguing for a realistic description of language for many years, observing that institutions, settings, scenes, activities and various sociocultural realities give order to such analysis.[3] An ethnographic approach to speech requires that the analyst have information about the relative statuses of the interlocutors, the setting of the speech act, the message, the code (including gestures), the situation, the topic, the focus and the presuppositions that are paired with the sentences. At long last, the

ethnographers of communication are beginning to get some help from linguists with other primary specializations. The upshot of all this ferment within the past few years has been an almost entirely new set of attitudes within the field of linguistics. It is difficult to describe linguistics at any point in its history as being settled with an orthodoxy but some broad, general movements can be discerned with hindsight. In the forties and fifties we saw a structuralist emphasis, with a focus on phonology, a concern for the word and a philosophical framework which was positivistic and empirical. In the sixties we witnessed the transformationalist era, with a focus on syntax, a concern for the sentence and a philosophical framework which was rationalistic or idealistic, with innate knowledge and intuition playing a prominent role in analysis.

As C.-J. Bailey (1973) points out, in the seventies we are now entering a new period with an emphasis on discourse and a philosophical framework which is dynamic rather than individualistic or static. It is characterized, of course, by the concerns noted above by the variationists, ethnographers, generative semanticists and creolists. Of particular concern to the interests of education is the underlying principle of the continuum. Like many such principles, it is patently obvious when noticed yet conspicuously absent from the history of language teaching.

It should be apparent, therefore, that sociolinguistics arose out of a number of factors within the field of linguistics itself. A convergence of different avenues away from orthodox generative theory took place among dialectologists, creolists, semanticians and anthropologists. Although the avenues were different, each shared a concern for variation, social reality, larger units of analysis (discourse) and a sense of continuum.

In addition, two factors outside the proper domain of linguistics also contributed heavily to the development of sociolinguistics. One was the general broadening of interests which began to develop in the sixties, leading to new kinds of interdisciplinary studies. The second was the development of interest in problems faced by minority peoples, especially in the schools. Linguists began to take an interest in urban language variation and to understand that past research methodologies were not viable for such investigation. New data-gathering techniques were required and new modes of analysis were needed.

Meanwhile, linguists who had been interested in language variation as it is found in the creolization and pidginization of language also began to apply their knowledge to urban social dialect, particularly the urban, northern Black, often providing important historical backgrounds for language change and offering analytical insights brought about by their perspectives. The general focus, of course, was on variability, not abstract uniformity and the critical measurement point was provided by the variability offered by Vernacular Black English. It was thought of as an area worthy of educational attention. Everything seemed ripe for this focus on Black English except for one thing--nobody in the academic world knew very much about it.

Seminal studies were done in New York (by William Labov, Paul Cohen, Clarence Robbins and K. C. Lewis), in Detroit (by Roger Shuy, Walt Wolfram and William Riley), in Washington (by Ralph Fasold) and in Los Angeles (by Stanley Legum). Generalizations about the findings of these studies have been made by Fasold and Wolfram in relatively non-technical language (1970). Today variability in language analysis has become a crucial issue thanks, at least partially, to the influence brought about by the study of Vernacular Black English.

What are some identifiable characteristics of Sociolinguistic work?

A focus of study which developed out of a diversity of interests the way sociolinguistics has is likely to have an equally diverse literature. Yet there are some common threads which seem to help hold sociolinguistics together. One such characteristic is the concept of gradience mentioned earlier.

Gradience. As is often the case, personal experience provides a good first example. When I was in college I had a part-time job in a wholesale grocery warehouse loading and unloading trucks and boxcars. My fellow teamsters knew that I was a college kid but also expected me to be one of them in some sense of the word. As a native speaker of their local version of nonstandard English, I found it possible to use the locally acceptable "I seen him when he done it" forms but their linguistic expectations of a college kid made them suspicious of me every time I tried. Years ago the novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote a novel called You Can't Go Home Again. His thesis was that peo-

ple are the products of their changing environment and that this changing environment includes the changing expectations of others. Translated to our situation this means that no matter how uneducated a person's parents may be, they expect their child to speak something other than the non-standard English they grew up with. The child who is sensitive to his parents' wishes may respond by rattling off a locution that appears to be within the range of his parents' expectations. On the other hand, some situations may require him to not deny his heritage but to not appear uppity either. Precious few linguistic situations will require him to preserve his non-standard dialect exactly the way it was before he was educated and elevated to some other level of expectation by those who love him. The following sentences may serve as illustrations of some of the points on such a continuum.

1. Hey! Don't bring no more a dem crates over here!
2. Hey! Don't bring no more a dose crates over here!
3. Hey! Don't bring no more a those crates over here!
4. Hey! Don't bring any more of those crates over here!
5. Please don't bring any more of those crates over here.
6. Gentlemen, will you kindly desist in your conveying those containers in this general direction?

Number 6 is surely undesireable in most communications and it is included only to extend the limits of the continuum as far as can be imagined. Most of the adjustments that an educated speaker makes to his audience are found in various modifications of numbers 3, 4 and 5. Most certainly, there are few opportunities for him to go home to the non-standardness of numbers 1 or 2. Those who know him will think he is patronizing them or, worse yet, making fun of them. Consequently, what the speaker does is to make subtle adjustments in his vocabulary, grammar and phonology depending on the informality of the situation, the audience and the topic. One safe move is to standardize the grammar, since grammar is the most signmatizing aspect of American social dialects, while occasionally preserving a few of the less stigmatizing pronunciations and leaving in some flavor of the lexicon. This is a highly subtle and complicated linguistic manuever which can hardly be oversimplified or underestimated.

In no way should it be implied that the specific continuum given as

example above is meant to be a right to wrong slide. Each item of the continuum has the potential for appropriateness and accuracy if the proper setting, topic and person is discovered. But the schools would be likely to take it as a right-wrong series with a sharp line between numbers 3 and 4 with wrong facing one direction and right facing the other. Likewise, all of the rights would be considered good and all of the wrongs would be thought bad. What such an oversimplification denies, of course, are the following things:

1. That language use is more complex than any presupposed context or psuedo-moral code will permit.
2. That users of language may intentionally select so-called stigmatized constructions.
3. That users of language may unintentionally select so-called constructions which, having been used, provide clear evidence of their having learned part of the pattern though not all of it.

It has been argued by linguists that people tend to be unable to perceive the fact that they are using language as they use it. One might ask, for example, if the fish see the water in which they are swimming. Much rather clear evidence seems to indicate that users of language are fairly unaware of how it is that they are giving themselves away as they speak. Studies of social stratification using only language data may well be the most accurate indices of socio-economic status yet devised. Since people have such a hard time seeing the language they and others use (for they are, after all, concentrating on understanding it, not analyzing it), they remain relatively naive about the subtle complexities they are able to engineer in using it. Contrastive norms in language production and in subjective reactions to language are a clear case in point. Many New Yorkers and Detroiters, for example, will realize a high frequency of a stigmatized feature in their own speech despite the fact that they can clearly recognize the same feature as stigmatized in the speech of others.[4]

Frequency of Occurrence. In addition to the complexities growing out of gradience and general variability, another area of complexity to which linguists have only recently attended is quantitative variability. As odd as it now may sound, it has not been the practice of linguists to note the frequency of occurrence of a given variable feature until very, very recently. An amusing internal argument is still going on between linguists who understand this

principle and those who do not. It is said, for example, that copula deletion is a characteristic of Vernacular Black English as it is spoken in New York, Washington, D. C. and Detroit. Certain linguists violently object to this idea, noting that Southern Whites also say "he here" or "you gonna do it". And, of course, they are quite correct. What they fail to see, however, is that those who posit copula deletion as a characteristic of Vernacular Black English are not comparing Southern Whites to Northern Blacks but are, quite the contrary, concerned about what is considered Vernacular Black English in those specific Northern contexts. But even there, we find that speakers of that dialect do not delete every copula. In fact, the frequency of occurrence of that deletion stratifies quite nicely according to socio-economic status. Likewise, not every standard English speaker produces a copula every time it might be expected in his speech, although the frequency of occurrence is probably very high. An even clearer case is that of multiple negation which is also said to characterize Vernacular Black English, even though it is quite clear that many whites also use the form regularly. What, then, can it mean to call it Vernacular Black English? Simply that it is consistently found to occur in the continuous, natural speech of Blacks at a much higher frequency than it occurs in the speech of whites from the same communities and of the same socio-economic status. Strangely enough, this sort of finding is still rather new in linguistics and, to some linguists, quite heretical.

An example of a display of such data on the frequency of occurrence of a linguistic feature which is shared by all social groups (most of them <u>are</u> shared) is the following:

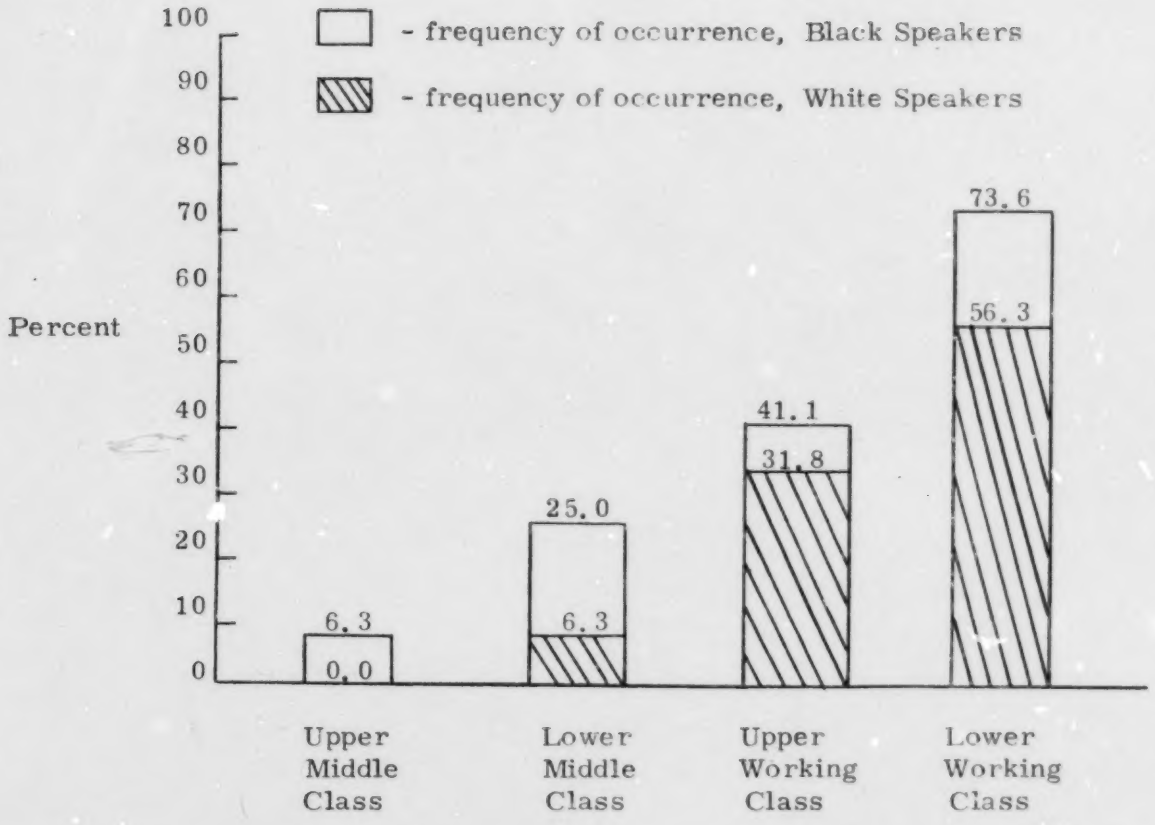


Figure 1. Multiple negation: frequency of occurrence in Detroit, by SES group.

Note that the frequency of occurrence of the use of multiple negation across four SES groups in Detroit is maintained regardless of the race of the speakers, but that Blacks use multiple negation at a higher frequency than do whites. Further information reveals that men use them at a rate higher than women. Such data cannot tell us that blacks use multiple negatives and that whites do not. Nor could it say that men use them and women do not. But it does offer rich information about the tendencies toward higher or lower variability usage than we could ever obtain from a methodology which offered only a single instance of such usage as evidence of its use or non-use. The figures above represent a number of informants in each of the four SES groups and a large quantity of occurrences of the feature for each informant represented in the group. In the case of multiple negation, in addition to tabulating the occurrences, it was necessary to see them in relationship to a meaningful touchstone. Thus every single negative and every multiple negative in each speaker's

speech sample were added together to form a universe of potential multiple negatives. The figures, tabulated above, display the relationship of the occurrence of multiple negatives in relationship to all potential multiple negatives.

It is reasonably safe to assume that the extent of language variation is much broader than previous research methodologies ever revealed. If an informant is asked, for example, what he calls the stuff in the London air, he may respond only once, /fag/. If he should happen to use the /a/ vowel before a voiced velar stop only 50% of the time during all the occasions in which he refers to this concept during a ten-year period, this variability will be totally lost in this single representation in the interview. If he talks continuously for thirty minutes or so, he might use this pronunciation a dozen or more times, giving an increasingly more probable representation of his actual usage. Of course, such data gathering techniques work better for pronunciations in which the inventory of possible occurrences is very high than they do for lexicon. On the other hand, research in sociolinguistics indicates that pronunciation and grammar are more crucial indicators than vocabulary, a factor which certainly justifies high-lighting them for research.

Selectional Options. Once we dispose of the notion of the right-wrong polarity evaluation and conceive of language as a continuum which operates in realistic contexts, the possibility of selectional options becomes meaningful. It is conceivable, for example, that a speaker out of a number of possible motivations, may select forms which, in some other context, would be considered stigmatized. Detailed studies of language variation have only begun to scratch the surface of such continua but several examples are suggestive of fruitful avenues of future research.

For example, I can clearly remember that as a child in a blue-collar industrial community, certain language restrictions were operational among pre-adolescent boys. To be an acceptable member of the peer group it was necessary to learn and to execute appropriate rules for marking masculinity. If a boy happened to be the toughest boy in the class, he had few worries for whatever else he did would be offset by this fact. Those of us who were not the toughest could establish our masculinity in a number of

ways, many of which are well recognized. For example, the use of tough language, especially swearing, and adult vices, such as smoking, were sometimes effective means of obtaining such status. Likewise, if a boy were a good athlete, he could easily establish himself as masculine (in our society this was true only for football, basketball and baseball and not for sports such as swimming, soccer or tennis). On the other hand, a boy could clearly obtain negative points by having a non-sex-object relationship with a girl, by liking his sister, by playing certain musical instruments (especially piano and violin) and by outwardly appearing to be intelligent in the classroom. It is the latter avenue which is of interest to us here since the major instrument for adjusting one's outward appearance of intelligence was his use of oral language. Interestingly enough, what one did with written language seemed less crucial, as long as it remained a private communication between teacher and student. That is, a boy could be as smart as he wanted to on a test or an essay as long as the written document did not become public (i.e. become displayed on the bulletin board).

Thus two strategies for reasonably intelligent males in this society were as follows:

a. Keep your mouth shut in class. If the male is white, this might be interpreted as shyness. If he is Black, it usually is read as non-verbality. The strategy of keeping one's mouth shut in school is employed for different reasons at different times. In early elementary school the child soon learns that the name of the game is to be right as often as possible and wrong as seldom as possible. One way to prevent being criticized by the teacher is to keep one's mouth shut. By pre-adolescence, the male's strategy for keeping his mouth shut grows out of a complex set of pressures stemming from stereotyped expectations of masculine behavior (i.e. boys are less articulate than girls and less interested in school) and the inherent dangers of appearing unmasculine to one's peers.

b. If you give the right answer, counteract the "fink effect" by sprinkling your response with stigmatized language. It is this strategy which boys who are to survive the education process in certain speech communities must certainly master. Those who only keep their mouths shut tend to drop

out ultimately for whatever reasons. But males who learn to adjust to the conflicting pressures of school and peer pressure are those who have learned to handle the sociolinguistic continuum effectively. In the proper context and with the proper timing, an intelligent male can learn how to give the answer that the teacher wants in such a way that his peers will not think him a sissy. In English class he will learn how to produce the accepted forms with the subtle nuances of intonation and kinesics which signal to his peers that rather than copping out, he is merely playing the game, humoring the English teacher along. If he appears to be sufficiently bored, he can be allowed to utter the correct response. If he stresses the sentence improperly, he can be spared the criticism of selecting the accurate verb form. The six stage continuum noted earlier in this paper is a gross example of several choices available in such a situation. It is tempting to postulate that the male's need to counteract the "fink effect" by deliberately selecting stigmatized language forms is merely a working class phenomenon. Recent personal observations, however, have led me to question such a notion. My teen-aged son has lived his entire life in a middle-class, standard English speaking environment but it is only since he began playing on a football team that he has developed a small number of non-standard English features. The production of these features, which include multiple negation and d for th in words like these and them, is situationally confined to the present or abstract condition of football. He appears to use the standard English equivalents in all non-football contexts. Closer observation seems to indicate that not all members of the football team feel the same requirement. It would seem, in fact, that there are different pressures for different roles. My son is a defensive tackle, a position which seems to require the characteristics of an aggressive ape. Thus, apprentice apes must do everything possible to establish this condition. It is interesting to observe that pressure to select non-standard forms seems less evident among quarterbacks and flankers.

A second recent observation has to do with the diagnosis of reading problems in an affluent Washington, D. C. suburb. A well meaning third grade teacher has diagnosed one boy's reading problem as one of "small muscle motor coordination" and she suggested that the parents send him to

a neurologist at once. His father, a physician, objected strenuously muttering something about teachers practicing medicine without a license. Since I knew the family, I was asked to help discover the child's real problem. After a quick and dirty examination in which the boy evidenced little or no problem with decoding or comprehending material which was unknown to him, the only problem I discovered was that his reading was monotonous and mechanical. In the school's terminology, he did not read with "expression". A hasty survey of teachers revealed that boys tend to not read with expression, a fact which is generally accepted along with their non-verbality and dirty fingernails. Why didn't this boy read with expression? My hypothesis is that he considers it sissy. This boy is the smallest male in his class and he is using every means possible to establish his masculinity. In athletics what he lacks in skill he more than makes up for with careless abandon. His voice is coarse. His demeanor is tough. He swears regularly. And so on. It would behoove the schools to do several things here. One might question the usefulness of reading with expression at all, but teachers should certainly be able to distinguish this presumed problem from other types of reading problems, particularly neurological ones. But this seems to be evidence of the same sort of pressure, this time in a middle-class community, which pits school norms against peer norms to the extent that the child is willing to deliberately select the non-standard forms.

In addition to intentional selection of linguistic options, speakers also make unintentional selection of stigmatized language. One such selection involves the use of hypercorrections, a term which linguists use to refer to incorrect overgeneralization from already learned forms. Several years ago I noticed such a pattern in the development of my younger son's use of -<u>en</u> participles. Suddenly he seemed to be using the inflectional -<u>en</u> in all participle slots such as 'have thoughten', 'have senden' and 'have playen'. My first reaction was to drill Joel on the proper form but I soon realized that he was actually evidencing awareness of a newly acquired pattern. What he had not yet learned was how to sort the participles out into -<u>en</u> and non-<u>en</u> forms. That would take time, but it would come. Hypercorrection is perhaps more readily recognized by English teachers in the

form of the malapropism, a vocabulary item which comes close to the sound of the word intended but which clearly misses, yielding a humorous combination such as "prosecuting eternity". Grammatical hypercorrection yields equally psuedo-elegances such as "between you and I". In terms of selectional options, hypercorrections in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar pose an interesting problem which illustrates clearly the need to see language in a realistic social and psychological context. Hypercorrections, when detected, can count double or more in degree of stigmatization. If undetected, they are unlikely to be favored more than neutral. Thus, when people make judgments about the language used by a speaker, there are at least three areas of judgment involved: stigmatization, favoring and hypercorrection. Detected hypercorrection probably runs the greatest risk of negative social stigmatization. Oddly enough, vocabulary hypercorrection (malapropism) is probably the most highly stigmatized, followed by pronunciation hypercorrection (the pseudo-elegance of vahz for vase, for example) and last by grammatical hypercorrection (such as "between you and I"). Stigmatization reverses this procedure, with grammatical features most stigmatized (at least in America), followed by phonological and lastly by vocabulary. This process of favoring is still relatively unknown, and it is difficult to tell whether vocabulary or grammar is the most favored condition. Within each linguistic category (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary), individual features can be placed and rank ordered, although the exact nature of this ordering is not totally known at this time.

Perceptual Viewpoint of the Whole. Still another characteristic of sociolinguistics is involved in the very viewpoint from which language phenomena are perceived. It is logical to believe that once the basics of language are understood, other less central features will fall into place. It has been traditional in linguistics to follow this logic. Thus linguists of various theoretical persuasions have searched for the core, the basics and the universals of language and have paid little attention to the peripheral, the surface or the variables. Sociolinguists do not decry an interest in universals or basics, but feel that the peripheral variables are much more important than have ever been imagined. In fact, sociolinguists tend to treat peripheral and basic com-

ponents on a par, and they believe that to understand one, they must also know a great deal about the other. Sociolinguists, therefore, stress variation, especially as it is related to sex, age, race, socio-economic status and stylistic varieties. They feel that by paying attention to such variables, they can better understand the exciting dynamics of language and see it as a whole.

Subjective Reactions. The development of sociolinguistics has also been paralleled by an interest in the subjective reactions of speakers to language. If speakers produce linguistic features with varying frequencies, if they make use of complex selectional options and if they shift back and forth along a base line continuum, they most certainly also react to language produced by others. In recent years, sociolinguists have become interested in three types of subjective reactions to variation in spoken and written language:

1. Studies which compare subjective reactions to more than one language.
2. Studies which compare subjective reactions to variation within the same language.
3. Studies which compare accented speech, the production of a language by non-native speakers.

It is felt that such studies will enable linguists to get at the threshhold, if not at the heart, of language values, beliefs and attitudes. From there it is a relatively short step to relating such attitudes to actual language teaching and planning. For example, research by Wallace Lambert and his associates (1960) attempted to determine how bilingual Canadians really felt about both English and French in that area. Therefore several bilinguals were tape recorded speaking first one language, then the other. The segments were scrambled and a group of bilingual Canadians were asked to listen to the tape and rate the speakers on fourteen traits such as height, leadership ability, ambition, sociability, character and others. The listeners were not told that they were actually rating people twice--once in French and once in English. It was somewhat surprizing to the researchers that the speakers were generally stigmatized when they spoke French and favored when they spoke English. This was interpreted as evidence of a community-wide stereotype of English-speaking Canadians as more powerful economically and socially.

An example of a study which compares listener reactions to variation within the same language was done in Detroit (Shuy, Baratz and Wolfram 1969). An equal number of Black and white, male, adult Detroiters from four known socio-economic groups were tape recorded in a relatively free-conversation mode. These tapes were played to Detroiters of three age groups (sixth grade, eleventh grade and adult). An equal number of males and females, Blacks and whites listened to the tape. These judges represented the same four socio-economic groups as the speakers. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects which the race, sex, socio-economic status and age of the listener have on identifying the race and socio-economic status of the speaker. The results of the study showed that racial identity is quite accurate for every cell except for the upper middle-class black speakers, who were judged as white by 90% of the listeners, regardless of their race, age or sex. It also showed that the lower the class of the speaker, the more accurately he was identified by listeners, regardless of all other variables. The significance of this lies in the fact that listeners apparently react negatively to language more than favorably to it. That is, signmatizing features tend to count against a speaker more than favoring features tend to help him. Such information is, of course, useful in determining how to plan a language learning curriculum, among other things.

A recent study of accented speech was done by A. Rey (1974) and contrasted the subjective reactions of Miami teachers, employers and random adults to the accented speech of Cuban-born and native white and black Miamians. Rey's interest was in the extent to which accent played a role in both employability and school evaluation. He played tape recordings of various speakers to groups of listeners and concluded that the lower status Cuban-born Miamians have the least chance for success, even if the employer or teacher is also Cuban-born.

What are the prospects for Sociolinguistics in the future?

To date, the study of sociolinguistics can be said to have hardly begun. Variation is a vast expanse of possibilities which should keep linguists busy for years to come. A very small dent has been made in the study of

variation among certain minority groups. Through an accident of history, a great deal has been learned about Vernacular Black English but very little is known about the variation used by standard English speakers, regardless of race. Little is known about the sort of variation which establishes a speaker as a solid citizen, a good guy or an insider. Despite some intensive research in the area, little is known about how people shift from one register to another or, for that matter, from one dialect or language to another. Only the barest beginnings have been made in the study of special group characteristics related to language (i.e. language and religion, law, medicine, etc.). A great deal of research needs to be done on language attitudes, values and beliefs. Although language change has received attention in a number of recent studies, sociolinguistic research still lacks knowledge of a number of aspects of the exciting dynamics of language.

In short, the social contexts in which language can be studied have almost as many variations as there are people to vary them. In some fields of study, graduate students writing theses or dissertations often become discouraged over the fact that all the good topics for research have already been used up. This dilemna is far from a reality in sociolinguistics, where topics abound and where we are only at the beginning.

NOTES:

[1] See, for example, William Labov, The social motivation of a sound change, Word 19:273-309 (1963).

[2] For an account of the effects of social situation on formal grammar, see Charles Fillmore, A grammarian looks to sociolinguistics in R. Shuy (ed.), Sociolinguistics: current trends and prospects, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press (1973).

[3] One might cite many references over a period of time. For a recent overview, however, see Dell Hymes, The scope of sociolinguistics in R. Shuy (ed.), Sociolinguistics: current trends and prospects, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press (1973).

[4] See, for example, William Labov, The social stratification of English in New York City, Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics (1966).

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